

673 PRIVATE Eric BULLOCK
54th Battalion



Eric Bullock described himself as an 18-year-old farmer when he chose to enlist at Moore Park in Sydney on 3 July 1916. Eric was the son of Luke and Rebecca Bullock of 'Oakwood', Bodangora, and both his parents signed a document giving their consent for Eric to enlist. Eric was presented with a wristlet watch upon his farewell from the Bodangora district.

A regimental number of N35902 indicates that Eric spent a period of time at an Australian Depot prior to being accepted in the AIF. Eric spent several months at a depot in Marrickville; here Eric was in the Machine-Gun Section. On 25 October 1916 Eric was transferred to a Machine-Gun Training Depot at Seymour in Victoria.

Eric became part of Number 16 Company while at Seymour where he undertook further machine-gun training prior to being shipped overseas. While in training Eric met with an unfortunate accident when while carrying a machine-gun he fell back onto another. The one he was carrying fell on his chest and broke two of his ribs. Eric was hospitalised as a result.

This injury prevented Eric from sailing until June 1917. Eric sailed as part of the 12th Reinforcements for the 14th Machine Gun Company. Apparently Eric advised his mother that he was to sail aboard the troopship *Ballarat*, instead Eric sailed from Melbourne aboard the *Suevic* on 21 June.

One could imagine Rebecca's concern for her son when she read of the sinking of the *Ballarat*. It would take until September 1917 before Rebecca would learn that Eric had not been aboard the *Ballarat* and was in fact training in England.

Eric had safely landed at Devonport, England, on 26 August, marching in to the 14th Training Battalion at Hurdcott. On 12 September Eric and presumably others from his draft were transferred as reinforcements for the 54th Battalion. On 18 December 1917 those men were sent to France to join their new battalion.

After passing through the base depot at Le Havre, Eric and the other men reached the 54th Battalion on the Western Front on 23 December. Eric would serve with the 54th Battalion while in the frontline.

The 54th Battalion was at this time in the Messines sector, where the battalion was engaged in re-building their defences and consolidating their position. The battalion was not involved in any major offensives in early 1918, like all Australian battalions the 54th Battalion sort to control their sector through active patrolling and trench raids.

When a major German offensive was launched in late March 1918 the 54th Battalion as part of the 5th Division were sent to defend the sector around Corbie. The 54th Battalion took up positions to the north of Villers-Bretonneux and doggedly held their positions even when the village nearby fell, threatening their flanks.

The battalion was still holding positions near Villers-Bretonneux in early June. On 15 June Eric attended the 15th Australian Field Ambulance suffering badly from trench fever. Eric was evacuated back to the 61st Casualty Clearing Station and by 18 June was back at the 9th General Hospital at Rouen.

Three days later Eric was on his way back to England for treatment. On 22 June Eric was admitted to the Kitchener Military Hospital at Brighton, his condition still listed as severe. On the 27 June Eric had stabilised enough to be transferred to the 3rd Auxilary Hospital at Dartford.

Eric had recovered sufficiently to be granted furlough on 28 June. He was granted two weeks leave and at the completion of his leave on 12 July was to report to the Number 4 Command Depot at Hurdcott. Notification of Eric's admission to hospital suffering Trench Fever would only have reached 'Oakwood' as Eric reached Hurdcott.

While at the Hurdcott Depot Eric ran foul of the authorities, on 20 August he was listed as AWL (absent without leave). Captain A.S. Isaac awarded Eric 7 days CB (Confined to Barracks) and the forfeiture of two days pay (while he had been absent). On 7 September he was again fronted before Captain Isaac, charged with Neglecting to obey an order. For this offence he received a further 2 days CB.

The 54th Battalion was disbanded in mid-October 1918 on the Western Front; the remaining fit men of the battalion were merged into the 56th Battalion. By early November Eric, who was by now considered fit enough to return to France, was transferred as a reinforcement for the 53rd Battalion.

With the declaration of peace on 11 November 1918 the need for Eric to return to France was negated and he remained at Hurdcott. On 25 January 1919 Private Eric Bullock boarded the *Ceramic* and began his return voyage to Australia. During the voyage he was briefly appointed as the Pay Sergeant (Eric's substantive rank remained Private).

Eric Bullock was discharged from the AIF on 28 April 1919. Eric returned to the Wellington district after being discharged, and he married Ada Job in June 1923. The couple had three children, Gordon, Joan and Val.

Eric again served during WW2, serving as a Warrant Officer with the Australian Army Provost Corps. Posted to the 14th Detention Barracks for much of that time Eric served throughout the war (1939-1945).

